



## **| Bringing New Participants into the Planning Process**

**Research sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration  
Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation  
U.S. Department of Transportation**



**MAKING COMMUNITIES MORE WALKABLE**  
in cities and towns across Massachusetts since 1990



# Research focus

**Develop and test techniques to broaden transit users' participation in planning by:**

- Identifying transit users who do not typically get involved in formal planning processes
- Develop techniques to engage these non-participants
- Test the techniques and elicit opinions on public agency plans

# How do we know people are missing from the planning process?

- Looked in detail at a study area with a number of projects – both recent and still underway
- Jamaica Plain - 38,000 people
- 38% use public transit and get to transit by walking
- 11% of JP residents walk to work
- During 6 recent planning efforts only 15 – 20 regular participants
- Demographic, economic and cultural mix of the neighborhood was not represented

# Public participation can unintentionally exclude many community members.

- Meetings are too frequent & too demanding of continuous participation
- Information can be too technical and too difficult to follow for occasional participants
- May be difficult to attend for affected transit users (evenings, requiring long transit trips)
- May be uncomfortable for non-English speakers



**SNOW CLEARANCE**  
Quitanieve



**REAL-TIME BUS ARRIVAL INFORMATION**  
Senales con info actual de autobuses



# Who do we want to reach to understand how to improve transit?

- Current, frequent users of transit
- Mix of income groups
- Mix of ages and cultures
- Riders wanting better access
- Businesses that depend on transit service



**COUNTDOWN SIGNALS**  
Senales con cuenta de segundos



**NEWSTANDS**  
Puestos de revistas

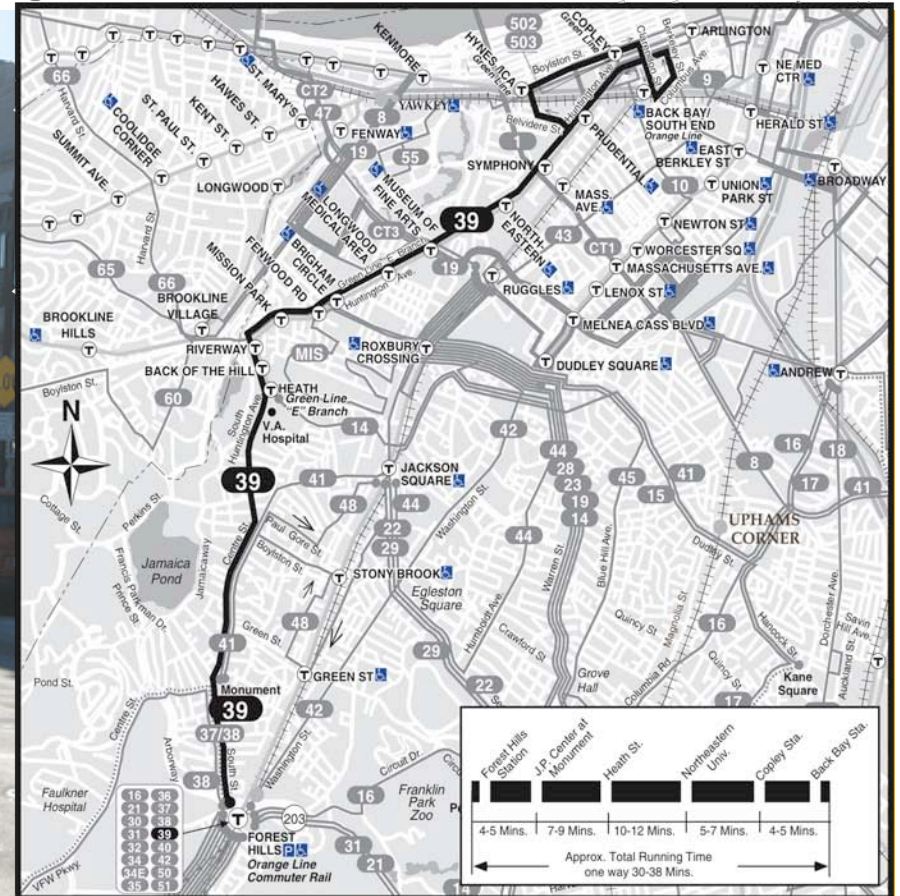
# **When in the transit planning process can participation make a difference? And, when are people likely to participate?**

- When a planning process is underway for imminent changes
- When an issue is well publicized
- When there is heightened public interest in planning due to differences of opinion

**WalkBoston coordinated the research effort with two ongoing studies**



**Route 39** Forest Hills Station - Back Bay Station via Huntington Avenue



## MBTA Route 39 Study Goals

- Consolidation of bus stops
- New bus shelter program
- Curb extensions
- Improved speeds on whole route



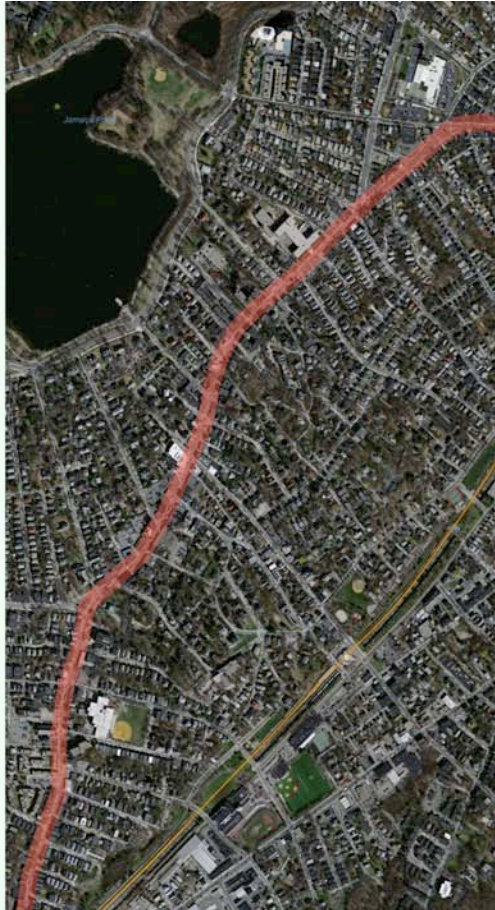
# Jamaica Plain CENTRE SOUTH

Transportation  
and  
Streetscape  
Action Plan

SCOPE  
OF  
WORK



*City of Boston*  
Thomas M. Menino, Mayor



## Centre/South Streets Study Goals

- Bus stop improvements
- Reconfiguration of 2 local business areas
- New street furniture
- New crosswalks

## How we looked for new participants

- Targeted transit users where they are
- Looked for people willing to listen a few moments
- Deliberately included non-English speakers
- Deliberately drew out those less sophisticated about the public participation process
- Went to people where they work

## What we tested

1. Bringing transit planning questions to existing meetings held by neighborhood organizations
2. Inviting neighborhood groups to participate in transit-related walking audits
3. Short on-street, in-person surveys of bus riders
4. Door-to-door merchant and business interviews
5. Walk-By Visioning – an interactive process



# Geography of interactions





# Interactions by Time of Day

# **1. Presentations at neighborhood meetings**

- Professional or business organizations, neighborhood groups, outdoor community events

## **Conclusions from presentations**

- Community meetings attract the “regulars”
- Neighborhood meetings do not represent all residents
- Business organization meetings do not attract all merchants
- Little interest in discussing process issues
- Participants tend to focus on service issues

## **2. Walking Audits**

- Invited professional or business organizations, neighborhood groups, attendees at community events

### **Conclusions from walking audit invitations**

- On-street audits require active participation of community groups – very difficult to obtain
- Consolidation of bus stops and the condition of walking routes not sufficiently compelling to generate interest
- Adding basic audit questions to interviews with local merchants was very useful

### **3. Short on-street, bus stop interviews**

- Tested both paper interview forms and iPads for novelty
- Very short interviews – the “bus was coming!”

#### **Conclusions from on street interviews**

- Lack of interest – people may not see interviews as useful ways to register opinions
- Some people are threatened by forms
- Non-English speakers are most wary, very few participated
- Bus riders are in a hurry, distracted
- iPads were of no interest
- Bus stops do have promise to reach new participants



iPad 3:21 PM 100%

Libraries ◀ 🔍 ▶ Bus Demographi... + ✎ 📁 🗑 ⚙

Date Created Jun 22, 2010 10:42 AM

Date Modified

Location

Participates ▾

Gender ▾

Age ▾

Race ▾

Language ▾

Rides 39 ▾

Knows Study... ▾

Owns Car ▾

Other Public... ▾

# iPad Survey

- Location
- Gender
- Age
- Race
- Language
- Whether or not they ride Route 39
- Level of knowledge about the study
- If they own a car
- What other transit routes they use

## 4. Door-to-door business interviews

- 100% sample in Centre/South corridor
- Informal, unscheduled, drop-in interviews.
- Spoke with any representative of the business, not necessarily the owner
- Minimal questions: are you aware...?
- Open ended conversation
- Illustrations from city's planning process



# Recommended Alternatives



## PRO:

- Creates active pedestrian areas adjacent to existing commercial buildings
- Equally allocates sidewalk to all corners of the square
- Shortest pedestrian crossings
- Opportunity to divide pedestrian zones by use
- Retains existing traffic pattern

## CON:

- Loss of parking in the intersection
- Potential for congestion during peak hours
- Limited accessibility to abutters on the southeastern frontage
- Potential difficulty for bicyclists to navigate the roundabout



## PRO:

- Prioritizes through movement on Centre Street
- Provides space in most usable locations
- Maintains majority of parking throughout the square

## CON:

- May require signalization
- Access to Day Street

# Conclusions from business interviews

- Positive response from almost every business
- Inclusiveness appreciated
- Business hours respected
- Many suggestions for improved crosswalks; few for improved street furniture and landscaping
- Some get info from informal network
- Great opportunity to tell people what's going on



**PEDESTRIAN SIGNS AT CROSSWALKS**  
Los signos de los peatones en los cruces



**EXTENDED SIDEWALKS AT BUS STOPS**  
Extensiones de la acera en las paradas



## Lessons in business interview techniques

- Targeted effort can reach merchants and business people
- Reached a mix of managers, owners, staff
- Merchants cannot leave businesses for meetings – so going to them is necessary to include them
- Interviews that take place at stores/businesses get great responses
- Low-cost, no scheduling issues because these were drop-in interviews: 2 two-person teams could do 20 interviews/afternoon

## 5. Walk-by-visioning – hands-on interaction

- Interactivity is novel and generated a lot of interest
- Low cost, low tech
- Simple to administer
- Easily replicable in other settings
- People can be randomly selected if desired
- Livelier displays attract more participants
- Non-threatening, easy to vote
- Anonymous, no record of participants' names
- Reaches many people and diverse participants
- Illustrates possible civic improvements



## Walk-By Visioning in action

# Questions used in Walk-By Visioning

- Your personal preferences for types of improvements
- Your thoughts about city improvement proposals
- Your vote for preferences





# WalkBoston



**BUS SHELTER (WALLS & ROOF)**  
Parada de autobus cerrado (paredes y techo)



**OPEN BUS SHELTER (ROOF ONLY)**  
Parada de autobus cerrado (solo un techo)



**TRASH CANS**  
Botes de basura



**POSTED ROUTE NUMBERS**  
Puestos los numeros de las rutas



**SNOW CLEARANCE**  
Quitanieve



**COUNTDOWN SIGNALS**  
Senales con cuenta de segundos

## Walk-by Visioning



**SIDEWALK REPAIR**  
La reparacion de la acera



**EXTENDED SIDEWALKS AT BUS STOPS**  
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## Walk-By Visioning: Votes on elements

 walkBoston

## Walk-by Visualization at the Green Roots Festival in Jamaica Plain

June 7, 2009 - 12:00 pm

**83 people were approached** by WalkBoston staff

Observations:

52 Female; 31 Male

58 White; 11 Black; 7 Latino; 4 Asian; 4 NA

7 Teens; 21 20s; 23 30s; 15 40s; 15 50s+

75 people spoke English

8 people spoke Spanish\*

15 people declined to participate

**68 people participated**

Question	Responded yes	Responded no	Total* responses
Rides #39 bus	29	25	54
Knows of MBTA study	11	42	53
Knows of City of Boston study	6	43	49
Owns car	27	24	51
Other public participation experience	26	25	51

# a Spanish-speaking staff person was available

\* Totals vary because of crowded conditions at the event

# Walk-by Visioning: Sample results

Each participant was shown the posters with photos, and given 4 sticker votes, red, yellow, and green for the top three preferences, and a black sticker for least attractive. Stickers were tallied as follows:

Feature	"Top 3" votes	Last place votes
Enclosed bus shelter	38	0
Snow clearance	34	0
Posted bus schedules	29	3
Sidewalk repair	20	3
Trash cans	19	0
Pedestrian signs at crosswalks	14	1
Transit tracker signs	12	12
Street lights	10	1
Count-down signals	9	5
Open-sided bus shelter (just a roof)	9	7
Crosswalk markings near bus stops	8	0
Transit curb extensions	8	1
Posted route numbers	8	2
News stands	1	29

## Walk-by Visioning: Sample results

# Conclusions from Walk-By Visioning exercises

- Brings in new participants
- Low-key politically
- Low costs (primarily staff), easy set-up
- Many willing participants
- No commitment, no threats
- Participation is anonymous



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# Evaluation of the techniques

## Neighborhood meetings

- Relatively few individual participants were reached

## Walking audits

- Few groups or individuals were willing to devote time to field work

## Bus stop interviews

- Relatively little new information or opinion emerged

## Merchant interviews

- Reached all local merchants and brought in new voices

## Walk-By Visioning

- Reached many new people, bridged language gaps

## Key lessons learned

- Informal interviews and walk-by-visioning are less exact than surveys, but they reach many more people and a more diverse population
- Informal techniques and walk-by-visioning can be more enjoyable for people than formal surveys and were enthusiastically received
- Multi-lingual materials should be created to reach non-English speakers

# New tools for participation

- Informal interviews and walk-by-visioning can be carried out with limited staff time
- Informal interviews can be undertaken anytime to supplement a planning study – before, during or after a study, and prior to final decisions
- Techniques can evolve from fieldwork. The Walk-By Visioning exercise emerged to address some of the limitations of the bus-stop interviews



**CROSSWALKS AT BUS STOPS**

Los signos de los peatones en los cruces

## **New tools for participation, cont.**

- Informal interviews are non-threatening
- Not much time required of participants - no more than 15 min
- No special equipment, technology or training is necessary
- Less expensive than formal meetings and surveys
- Preference/priorities obtained with photos, maps, brief discussions
- Limited number of questions is essential for clarity



# Conclusions

- Go to participants in the field – don't ask people to come to you
- Make participation fun and visually interesting
- Keep things informal – much more comfortable for many people who do not usually participate in the formal processes
- Do not ask people to speak up in public – let them express opinions one-on-one



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